

Mechanics Savings Bank Building
80 Pearl Street
Hartford
Hartford County
Connecticut

HABS No. CT-395

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MECHANICS SAVINGS BANK BUILDING

HABS No. CT-395

Location: 80 Pearl Street
Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

USGS Hartford North Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 17.693230.4626240

Present Owner: Mechanics Savings Bank
One Financial Plaza
Hartford, CT 06103

Present Occupant: Vacant

Significance: The Mechanics Savings Bank building is a fine example of the Neo Classical Revival style of architecture. Its colossal granite fluted Doric columns in antis and the entablature they support with triglyphs, mutules and guttae are characteristic of the style. Architects for the building were Morris & O'Connor of New York who are well known for components of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford and the Cunard Building in New York. The Mechanics Savings Bank, organized in 1861, is perhaps the oldest banking institution in Hartford still operating under its original name.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1924. Hartford building permit #123, dated January 23, 1924.
2. Architects: Morris & O'Connor of New York. Benjamin Wistar Morris III (1870-1944) was the son-in-law of the Rev. Francis Goodwin, one of Hartford's three or four most influential citizens and the city's leading real estate developer. This connection brought Morris several Hartford commissions including the (J.P.) Morgan Memorial building at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the State Arsenal and Armory on Broad Street, and the State Savings Bank, another Neo Classical Revival structure that formerly stood across Pearl Street to the east. Probably the firm's most prestigious work was the Cunard Building, 25 Broadway, New York (1921) which has large and elegant interior spaces.
3. Original and present owner: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Clerk's Office of the City of Hartford, Connecticut. The property is parcel 1985 on City Engineer's Map 421.

1923 Deed, January 2, 1923, recorded in Volume 533, page 416.

Henry W. Seide et al

To

Mechanics Savings Bank

4. Builder:

Marc Eidlitz & Son. Hartford building permit #123, dated January 23, 1924.

5. Original plans and construction: No original drawings or plans have been located.
6. Alterations: At undetermined dates, the front door and first-floor front windows were replaced, the ceiling of the main banking room was dropped and interior finishes, partitions and doors were changed.

When Mechanics Savings Bank, for expansion, purchased the adjoining building at 60 Pearl Street, the first floor walls between the two in 1953 were, in large part, removed, creating a single space. 60 Pearl Street is the site of H.H. Richardson's Phoenix Insurance Co. building of 1872. In the absence of record of demolition, it is possible that the present structure may include 1872 fabric. The only known architecturally significant feature of the Richardson

building was its front elevation. The present false front of the building covers a non-original front elevation with metal windows in apertures of different size from those of the Phoenix Insurance Co.

B. Historical Context:

The Mechanics Savings Bank was organized in 1861. It occupied rented quarters on Central Row, opposite the Old State House, until constructing its own building at 80 Pearl Street in 1924, where it has been located until temporarily moving out a few weeks ago. The bank continues as an independent institution, and is a partner in the construction project about to get under way. Mechanics Savings Bank will resume occupancy at 80 Pearl Street upon completion of construction.

PART III: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The structure was built at the time when use of classical revival styles was at the height of fashion for banking institutions. The Neo Classical Revival front elevation and 2-story main banking floor imparted a desirable sense of traditional strength and stability.
2. Condition of the fabric: Sound.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The 2- and 3-story structure has a full basement. The building, which is rectangular in plan, is 48' in width, 118' in depth.
2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete.
3. Wall construction: Front wall is granite blocks. Side and rear walls are solid brick.
4. Structural system, framing: Steel columns, beam, joists, roof. Floors concrete.
5. Porches: None.
6. Chimneys: One.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The central front double door is glass.

See plans for location of secondary exits.

- b. Windows: First floor windows flanking the central door are plate glass replacements. Windows at second and third floors are original double-hung metal sash, 12/12 at the second floor and 8/8 at the third. There are three windows on each of these floors, front elevation. At the second floor rear there are two pairs of double-hung metal sash glazed in 3/3 pattern.
8. Roof:
- a. Shape, covering: The flat roofs are covered with tar and gravel.
 - b. Cornice: The front elevation has a granite parapet in which is incised the name of the bank, flanked by raised discs. The parapet is surmounted by a central stepped section.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There are two iron and glass skylights in the roof of the front section and two in the rear section.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The building is divided into three sections. The front section consists of foyer at first floor, board room at second floor office space at third and lounge at fourth. The central section is the 2-story main banking floor. The rear section is two stories, the vault at first floor with office space above. See sketch plans.
- 2. Stairways: There is a switch-back stairway in the front (southeast) corner and one in the rear. They have metal picket railings and wooden handrails. The front stair has grey marble floors at the landings and for the treads.
- 3. Flooring: The floor of the foyer is grey marble and it is thought that the floor of the main banking room probably is the same although it is now covered with several added surfaces and the original material is difficult to determine. Elsewhere floors are covered by carpet or tile except the basement floor which is concrete.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Original materials have been obscured by particle board paneling and acoustic tile. An exception is the area above the present dropped ceiling of the main banking floor. There remnants of the original treatment still are visible. The original ceiling, itself dropped, has been removed, but the top several feet of the walls may be observed. The large capitals of the shallow pilasters have been removed but their former location is clearly indicated. Egg-and-dart moldings at the bases of the capitals are still in place. The wall spaces between pilasters were decorated with classical motifs of rosettes alternating with foliage. The

decorative panels appear to have been applied by stenciling and then enriched by free-hand painting. Predominant colors are deep blue, medium green and gold (bronze paint). A second exception is the board room, second floor front, which retains its original Adamesque character. On the west wall the wooden fireplace mantel has a central anthemion panel that interrupts the architrave and frieze. There is a dentil course under the mantel shelf. A low molded chair rail runs along each of the four walls of the room. There are two ceiling medallions from which chandeliers are suspended. Whether the chandeliers are original is unknown.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: No original; doorways have steel bucks.
- b. Windows: Interior window trim is now gyp returns, which may have been original with the steel sash.

6. Decorative features and trim: See C., 4.

7. Hardware: The only original hardware appears to be the latches of the steel sash.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Original cast-iron radiators are located under the windows. They are plain, without raised embellishment. Modern HVAC distribution facilities are located above the dropped ceilings and in ceiling chases.
- b. Lighting: See C., 4.
- c. Plumbing: See sketch plans.
- d. Vault: The door to the vault is not original. The safe deposit boxes have been removed to the bank's present temporary location.
- e. A small Otis elevator, probably original, is in the foyer.

9. Original furnishings: None.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The bank faces south on Pearl Street, half a block west of Main Street. It faces the top of Lewis Street. The front elevation of the bank is visible when coming up Lewis Street. Other buildings in the immediate vicinity are tall modern office buildings.

2. Historic landscape design: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: None known.
- B. Historic views: The Mechanics Savings Bank Archives houses scrapbooks containing newspaper articles on the history and development of the Mechanics Savings Bank. A thorough search of the State of Connecticut Library, Hartford Collection, The Hartford Public Library Photo Collection, The Connecticut Historical Society, and The Hartford Newspaper Photo Morgue have produced no historic photographs of this building or general areas.
- C. Interviews: None.
- D. Bibliography:
 1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Hartford Land Records, volume 533, page 416.

Asylum-Trumbull-Pearl Streets Historic District, nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, 1984.
 2. Secondary and published sources:

Kuckro, Anne Crofut, Hartford Architecture, Volume One: Downtown, (Hartford: Hartford Architectural Conservancy, 1978).
- E. Likely sources not yet investigated: None known.
- F. Supplemental material: None.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The structures from 60 through 100 Pearl Street are to be demolished to make way for a new office building. The owners and occupants of the new building, in large part, will be the owners and occupants of the present buildings. The front elevation of the Mechanics Savings Bank will be substantially disassembled and reassembled as part of the front elevation of the new building. The vista coming up Lewis Street will continue to be the granite Doric column in antis. The Federal agency involved is the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

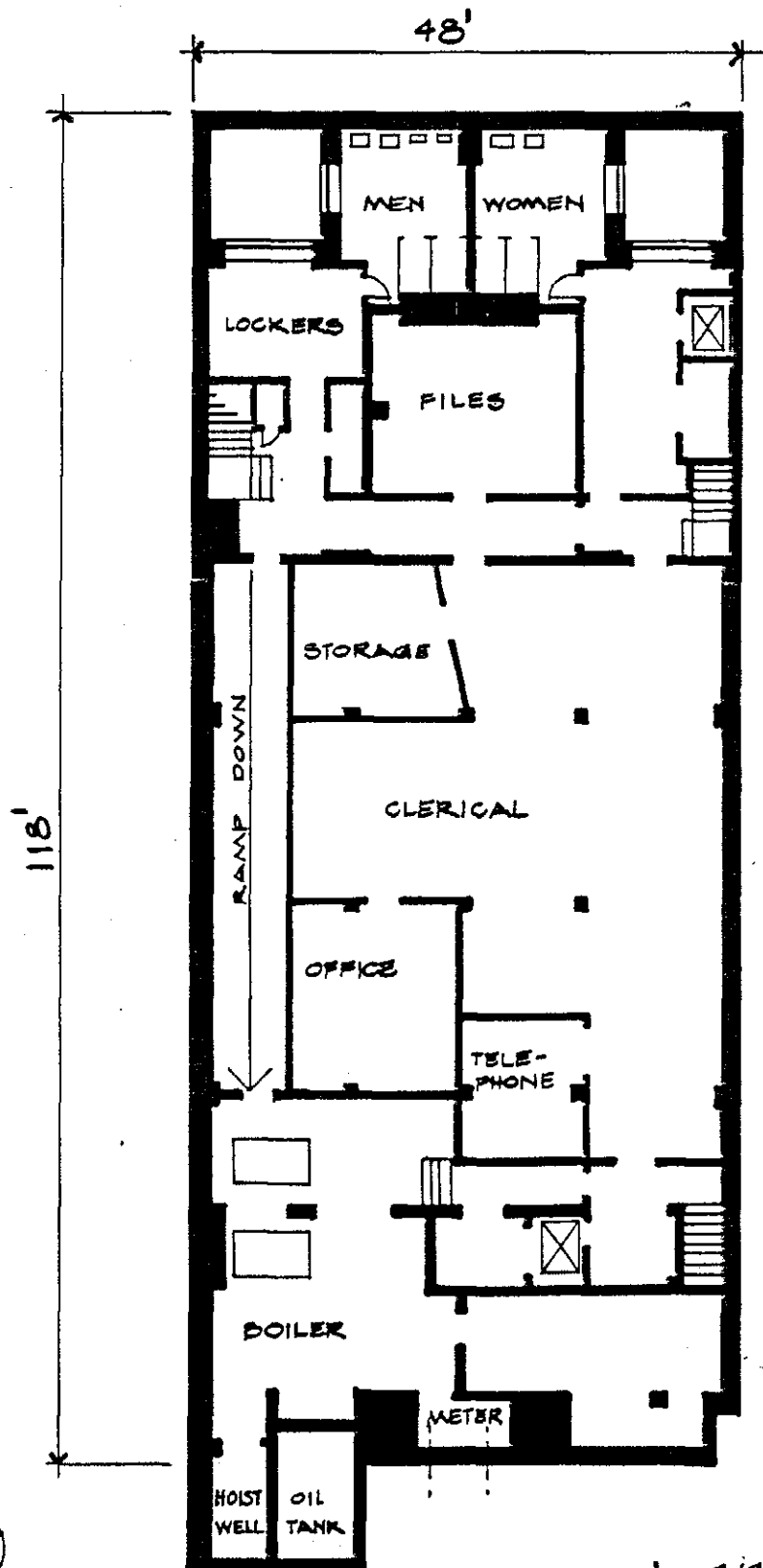
Prepared by

Oavid F. Ransom
January 27, 1986

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Basement Floor Plan



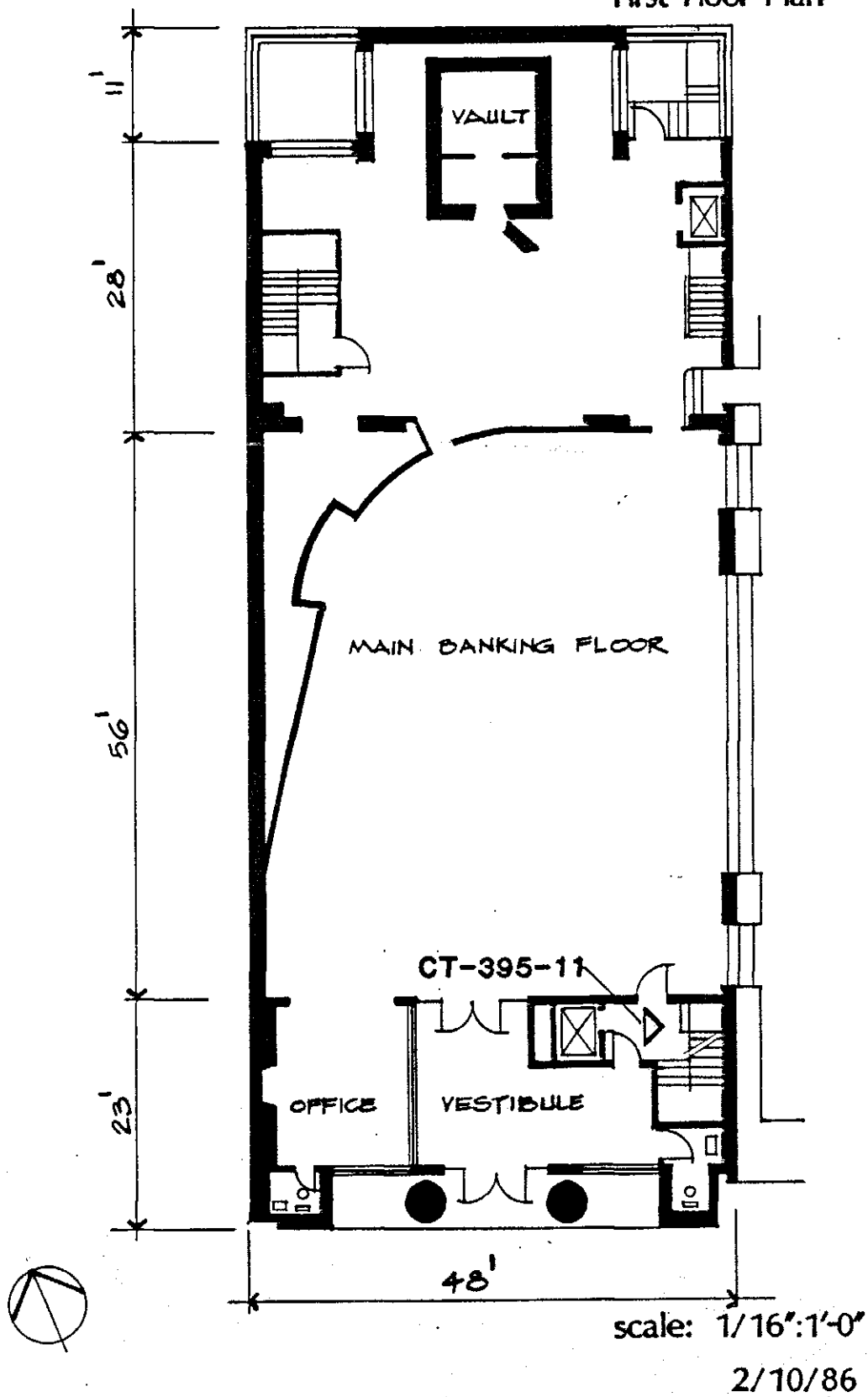
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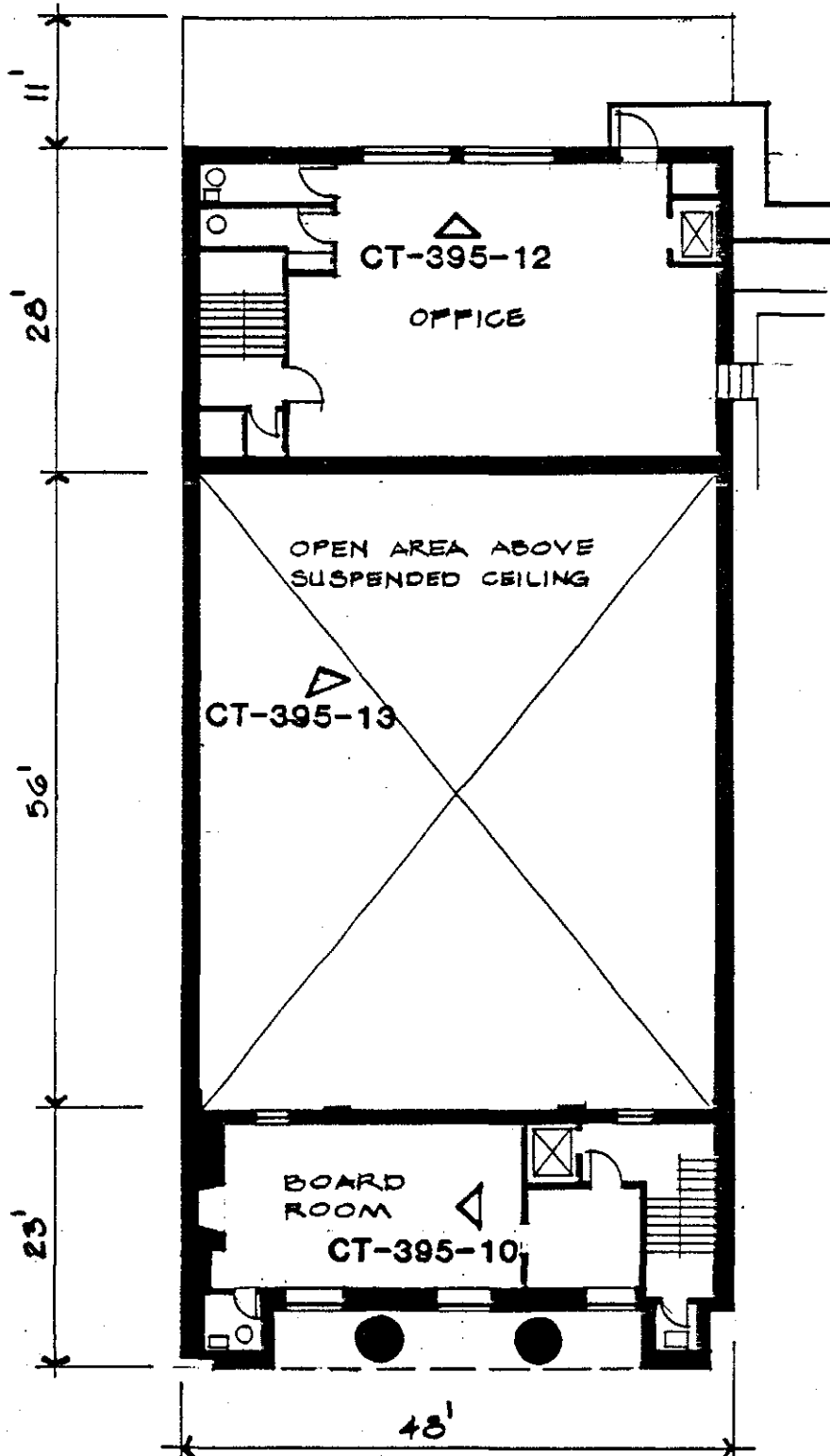
First Floor Plan



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Second Floor Plan



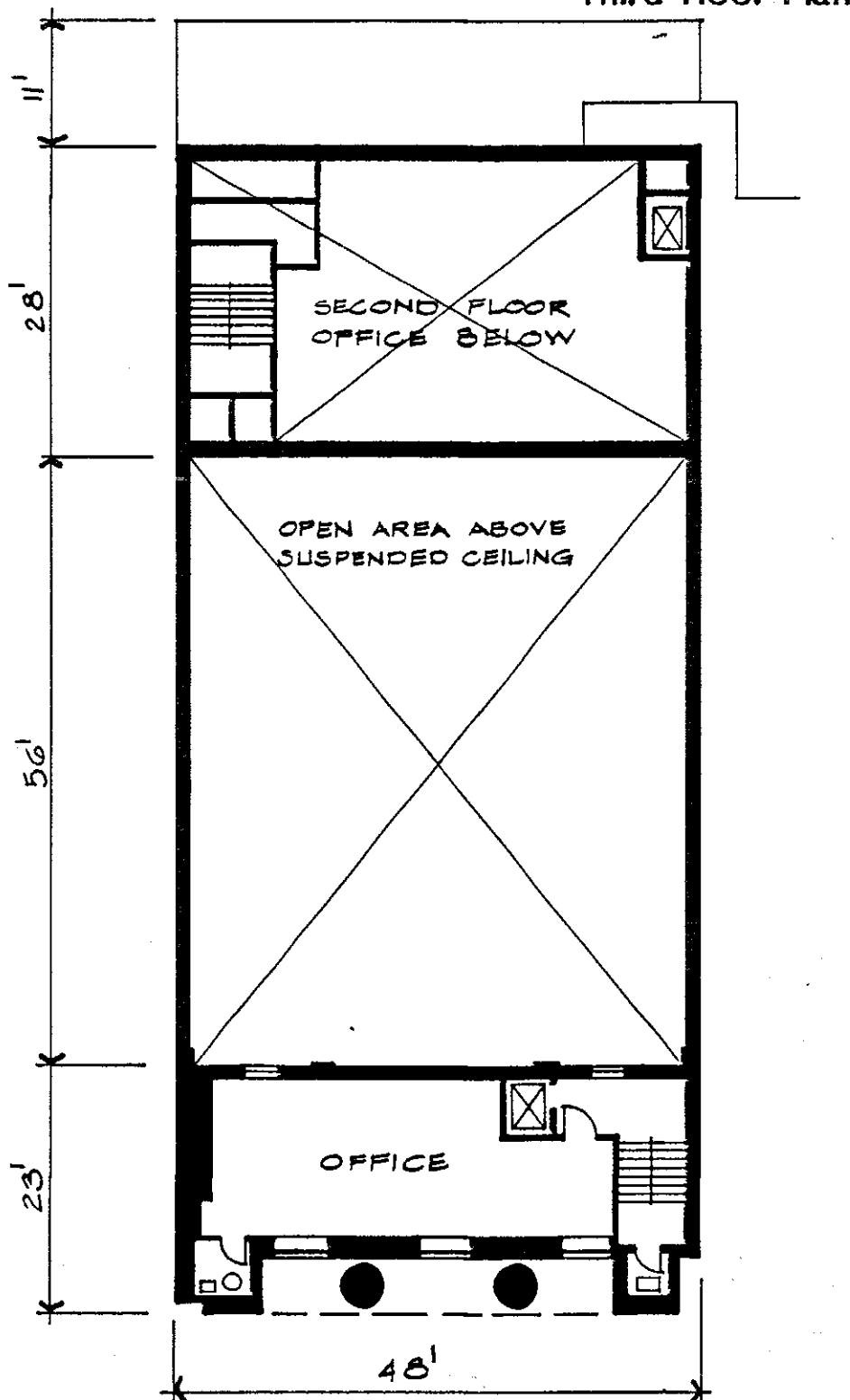
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Third Floor Plan



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Fourth Floor Plan

